

Since the beginning of the new administration and the 111th Congress, I have heard concerns from many of you about the possibility of new restrictions on gun ownership. I would like to take a moment to update you on the progress of a couple of bills in Congress that address this important issue and share my thoughts on them with you.

H.R. 45, the Blair Holt's Firearm Licensing and Record of Sale Act of 2009, is a bill that has generated a great deal of interest. My office has received dozens of calls, letters, and emails about this bill – the contacts have run at least 10 to 1 against H.R. 45.

Frankly, it is easy to understand why.

The bill would require that all handgun owners register their firearms and that they carry a license for those handguns.

Like those of you who have contacted me to share your thoughts on this bill, I am strongly opposed to it. I understand the intention of the sponsor is to reduce violent crime, especially in inner cities, and I think fighting crime is a goal all Americans ought to be able to get behind.

While I understand the good intentions, I strongly disagree with the means by which this bill goes about trying to reduce violent crime in our cities and on our streets.

In my view and in the view of many legal and criminal justice experts, banning handguns is not the solution to violent crime. Illegal guns are already an enormous problem for law enforcement; requiring law-abiding gun owners to register their legal handguns will not change that fact.

H.R. 45, though it was introduced in the first days of the 111th Congress, has attracted no official support and has no cosponsors. In order to provide a little perspective on the issue of cosponsors – which, I admit, sounds like Congressional “inside baseball” – nonbinding resolutions honoring local sports heroes or bills to name U.S. post offices can usually attract 15 to 20 cosponsors. H.R. 45 has none.

Nevertheless, you may be assured that if H.R. 45 or another scheme to license and regulate firearms came to the floor of the House, I would vote against it.

There is another bill that has also generated some interest which I would like to address – S. 2099. This legislation would have treated handguns as taxable under the National Firearms Act, a significant infringement on the rights of gun owners.

Some gun owners have been concerned that this bill has already become law and it would have required gun owners to list their handguns on their yearly tax returns. Fortunately, this is not true.

S. 2099 was introduced in the 106th Congress, in which my predecessor Rep. Sonny Callahan served, which convened from 1998 to 2000. The bill died in the Senate at the conclusion of that Congress and it has yet to be introduced again.

In the 111th Congress, the majority party has yet to signal their intention to take up legislation that would affect the rights of gun owners. In the event they chose to do so, I assure you I will continue to vote to protect the Second Amendment rights of all Americans.

Practicing What We Preach:

Over the past several months in which Congress has been debating health care reform, my office has received thousands of letters, phone calls, and emails from south Alabamians expressing their opinions on what has become one of the most important issues of the 111th Congress.

One of the consistent messages of these communications – regardless of the individual's position on any particular bill – is people feel that Members of Congress ought to practice what they preach. South Alabamians believe Members of Congress should not vote to create a government-run health insurance option without even the possibility of that option ever affecting them or their health coverage.

I agree, and that is why I have cosponsored a resolution in Congress that says any Senator or Representative who votes for a health care reform bill including a government-run insurance option should sign up for that option.

You may already know that Members of Congress and their staffs participate in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP), a health insurance exchange which gives federal employees access to a variety of private health insurance plans.

As Congress is debating and voting on this vital issue which impacts the lives of all Americans, I believe it is so important to keep in mind the real world consequences of the policies we are considering.

Whether or not you agree with one party's proposal for health care reform, I think we can all agree that Members of Congress and their staffs should practice what they preach in the field of health care reform. If a government-run option is good enough for America, it should be good enough for Capitol Hill as well.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.